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ABSTRACT

The policy statement by the American Foundation for the Blind deals with nature trails, braille trails, foot paths, fragrance gardens, and touch museums for the blind. It is stated that the foundation approves of services such as provision of tape recorded guides and planting of fragrant shrubs which would benefit all users while recognizing special needs of blind or visually impaired persons. Additionally, it is stated that the foundation disapproves of any activities such as special trails for the blind which perpetuate misconceptions and stereotyped thinking and tend to set blind people apart from the rest of the community. (DB)

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Policy Statement

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BACKGROUND

A loss or lack of vision does not deprive an individual of all esthetic pleasures since vision is only one of the senses through which any of us perceive the world around us. Specialized gardens, trails, or museums often carry a psychological impact that is distasteful to the blind or otherwise visually impaired person who has a consciousness of the dignity of self. Further, such specialized facilities can perpetuate negative stereotypes of those of our citizens who are blind or otherwise visually impaired. An important objection is the implication that smell or touch are the only ways through which a blind or visually impaired person can enjoy or appreciate plants or nature or museum objects. We believe all gardens or trails (such as those in public parks, wilderness areas, etc.) should include for the enjoyment of all people especially fragrant plants, bushes, or trees as well as herbs.

Vision is not the only sense through which one enjoys or appreciates the beauty of nature. The Foundation recognizes fully that any person, sighted or visually impaired, who has an appreciation of the beauty of a garden, park, or forest preserves appreciates the tactile experience of the texture, structure, and form of these objects, enjoys the fragrance of a beautiful flower, or the aromatic herbs or a tree and the sounds which are ever present in an outdoor setting.

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Most people visit parks, forest preserves, wild natural settings, or museums with family members or friends in order to share the beauty, recreational, and educational aspects of these facilities. This is equally true for blind and visually impaired persons. Whether the blind person is accompanied or alone, it is unnecessary to have any special design specifically for the blind and visually impaired in the surroundings as long as the areas are safe for everyone. Perhaps well-meaning persons who wish to develop such facilities could see that bushes, trees, trails, or exhibits are marked in regular and large print and braille, and also have a tape recording available describing the setting and the object. These means of communication would meet the needs of most visitors to such areas -- both sighted and visually impaired.

Blind or otherwise visually impaired persons will not necessarily visit one particular garden, park, trail, or section of a museum because of the existence there of special designations or concessions in the way of braille markers to substitute for the lack of vision. These specially designed projects often serve as areas of curiosity for sighted persons.

POLICY

The American Foundation for the Blind reaffirms its belief that the basic aim of all services for a blind or visually impaired person is to assist him to lead a full and normal life as an integral part of society.

Therefore, the Foundation strongly approves of services, activities, and benefits which recognize the special needs of blind or visually impaired persons, but disapproves of any such activity which prepetuates misconceptions and stereotyped thinking and tends to set blind or visually impaired persons apart from the rest of the community.

It is believed, therefore, that such facilities and experiences should be available to all persons in the community including visually impaired persons and not set aside or designated for the enjoyment of one special group. This does not, however, eliminate the desirability of tours through public facilities which could also be designed to meet the needs of special groups.

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